



Guide to USING CUES & VISUALS

WHAT IS IT?

Cues are quick verbal or non-verbal reminders of an expected classroom behavior.

Visuals are materials used throughout the day to clearly communicate classroom expectations to children. Visuals can also be used for daily schedules to aid in transitions.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- A child excitedly pulls on their classmate's sleeve while the class walks down the hall. When the teacher sees this, the teacher taps the child's shoulder and clasps their hands together to cue the child to keep their hands to themselves.
- Two children want to use the pink unifix cubes at the same time. To support them in problem-solving, the teacher provides a ring of picture cards from their classroom solution kit and encourages them to choose an option (e.g., share, take turns, get a timer) they can both agree on.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Everyone has their own cultural lens that guides their behavior and informs their expectations. Part of building a classroom community is establishing and maintaining realistic behavioral expectations to ensure that each and every child can learn and feel safe. In this process, children need support and gentle reminders to know what they are expected to do and when. Even when they know the expectations, children might need teacher scaffolding or reminders to apply them in-the-moment. Cues and visuals come in handy during these times because they quickly remind children what behaviors are expected (without requiring lengthy, time-consuming explanations).

Example Cues and Visuals

Here are a few examples of cues and visuals to support children in the classroom.

To signal that you are going to be sharing important information

- ☑ Cue: **Clap 3 times** (and have children clap in response to show they are paying attention).
- ☑ Visual: Hold up a **stop sign** to signal children to stop and listen.

To signal children to lower their voices

- ☑ Cue: **Hold your finger to your mouth** to cue a child to talk quietly.
- ☑ Visual: Point to a **sign** that has the word "Quiet" written on it.

To alert children of an upcoming transition

- ☑ Cue: Play **"clean-up" music** when it is time to transition to the next activity.
- ☑ Visual: Point to the picture of the next activity on your **visual schedule** to remind what is next.

To remind children of expected behavior

- ☑ Cue: **Clasp your hands together** to remind a student to keep their hands to themselves.
- ☑ Visual: Point to visual depictions of **classroom expectations** (e.g., sharing, turn-taking).



TIPS FOR USING CUES & VISUALS

1. SETTING UP cues and visuals

- ☒ Identify realistic expectations for behavior. It is often helpful to reflect on and discuss the reasons behind expectations and involve children in the decision-making process.
Focus on what children *should* be doing (e.g., “walk” instead of “do not run”).
- ☒ Choose and create cues and/or visuals.
Get creative or ask children for ideas! Make your own classroom drawings or photographs, or use existing templates (see *Examples of Cues and Visuals* or *Transition Visual Cards* handouts below). Be mindful that children from different cultures may interpret cues and visuals differently.
- ☒ Establish the meaning of cues/visuals and practice *before* using them.
Pointing to your ear, for example, will not let children know that you want them to listen unless you have explained its meaning. You may need to review cues and visuals daily before the day begins.

2. USING cues and visuals

- ☒ Use *immediately* before the expectation is required.
For example, a teacher waves the “walk” cue card after the class lines up to transition outside and again when children in the class speed up while heading down the hall.
- ☒ Use consistently to avoid confusion around expectations.
- ☒ When using class-wide, follow up with extra cues/visuals for individual children as needed.
- ☒ When using with an individual child, do not draw attention or single them out.
 - Use a hand signal to tell a child to “sit” rather than redirecting them in front of peers.
- ☒ Make sure to notice and reinforce children who use and respond to cues/visuals.
- ☒ Keep cultural, developmental and learning differences in mind when selecting which cues/visuals to use with the class and individual children.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT USING CUES & VISUALS

Using Cues and Visuals
[ECE Resource Hub](#)
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Examples of Cues and Visuals
[Available as PDF](#)
CASTL ©

Transition Visual Cards
[Available as PDF](#)
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